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From Condemnation to Melancholy
Alternative Meanings of Post-Communist Nostalgia in Romania Beyond the Official Anti-Communist Discourse

MĂRIUCA MORARIU

INTRODUCTION

"Whoever controls the past is likely to own the present"[1]

There are rather few phenomena that have received so many contradictory understandings as post-communist nostalgia: it has been labelled as a symptom of transition and associated with pejorative meanings, a symbol of disaffection with current economic, social and political conditions, a sign of dangerous amnesia, a fashion trend, a subversive attitude toward a new order, a generalised mourning for an irrevocable past exploited through kitsch, a coping mechanism, a form of dealing with the discontinuities imposed by a radical change, a communist legacy that keeps us inert and locked into an irrecoverable past. But how much of this long list is really accurate? And how can one make sense of it? When grasping such a complex phenomenon that is undoubtedly present in all post-communist countries in different degrees, one has to carefully analyse the differences between various forms of nostalgia, while critically assessing the speculations that oversimplify its determinants and impact on post-communist societies.

Recent European polls surveying people's perceptions about the past and their satisfaction with democracy account for a distinctive phenomenon: citizens living in post-communist countries tend to value communism increasingly more positively. The New Europe Barometer (2005), the Pew Research Center[2] and private national opinion polling institutions all agree that there is a "wave of nostalgia" in ex-communist countries[3]. In Romania, the Centre for the Study of Market and Opinion (CSOP) commissioned by the Institute for the Investigation of the Communist Crimes

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[1] Lucian BOIA, *Istorie și mit în conștiința românească*, Humanitas, București, 1997 (author's translation).

[2] Pew Research Center, "Two Decades after the Wall's Fall: End of Communism Cheered but Now With More Reservations. The Pew Global Attitutes Project", 2009: http://www.pewglobal.org/2009/11/02/end-of-communism-cheered-but-now-with-more-reservations/ (accessed 4 June 2012).

[3] See Nadia ATIA, Jeremy DAVIES, "Nostalgia and the Shapes of History: Editorial", *Memory Studies*, vol. 3, no. 3, 2010, pp. 181-186; Dominik BARTMANSKI, "Successful Icons of Failed Time: Rethinking Post-Communist Nostalgia", *Acta Sociologica*, vol. 54, no. 3, 2011, pp. 213-231; Kristen GHODSEE, "Minarets after Marx: Islam, Communist Nostalgia, and the Common Good in Postsocialist Bulgaria", *East European Politics and Societies*, vol. 24, no. 4, 2010, pp. 520-542; Victor GOMEZ, "Central Europe: Nostalgia for the Communist Past", *Transitions Online*, vol. 11, no. 23, 2004; Maya NADKARNI, Olga SHEVCHENKO, "The Politics

and the Memory of the Romanian Exile (IICCMER) concluded that 61% of the citizens consider communism a good idea compared to 53% four years ago[1]. The main reasons invoked by respondents concern: the availability of jobs, the standards of living, and property ownership. These results are confirmed by the Soros Foundation[2] and the Romanian Institute for Evaluation and Strategy[3] which align Romania to the average East-Europeans' opinions regarding the comparisons between past and present. While most respondents deem the communist regime illegitimate (42% compared to 39%), they also share the belief that "communism was a good idea, but wrongly implemented". One may conclude that the myth of social equality is still present in people's minds, but they have replaced a utopia with another. But since the present utopia has been a disappointment so far, this re-contextualizes the past which appears in a new light. This very intimate relationship between memory and identity makes the topic so important. If nostalgia is regarded as loss of memory, then a viable democracy cannot afford to accept it and the only way forward would involve "putting an end to nostalgia for an alleged period of greatness and independence, and embracing the country's de facto cultural pluralism and European future"[4]. The explanations usually given by sociologists, historians and political scientists stress the disillusionment with current social, economic and political conditions. This leads to an idealization of a totalitarian past[5], given people's strong emotional ties with their own youth which could be wrongfully mistaken for a feeling of melancholy' for a "Golden Age"[6]. As the former Polish dissident and writer, Adam Michnik, metaphorically suggested in an interview broadcasted on the Romanian Public Television (TVR1),

> "Those who regret communism are suffering from the 'prisoner's syndrome'. When you get out of prison, you enjoy sun and freedom. But you quickly remember that in prison someone gave you a home and a meal. Freedom is the responsibility of each and every one of us"[7].

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of Nostalgia: A Case for Comparative Analysis of Post-Socialist Practices", *Ab Imperio*, no. 2, 2004, pp. 487-519.

[1] IICCMER, "The Present-Day Perception on Communism - Opinion Poll", 2010: http://www.crimelecomunismului.ro/en/iiccmer_csop_opinion_polls/the_present_day_perception_on_communism_opinion_poll/ (accessed 4 June 2012).

[2] According to the Public Opinion Barometer of the Open Society Foundation, "Percepția actuală asupra comunismului – Comunicat de presă", 2006: http://www.soros.ro/ro/comunicate_detaliu.php?comunicat=21# (accessed 4 June 2012).

[3] IRES, "Românii și nostalgia comunismului", 2010: http://www.ires.com.ro/articol/93/romanii--i-nostalgia-comunismului (accessed 4 June 2012).

[4] Vladimir TISMĂNEANU, "Democracy and Memory; Romania Confronts Its Communist Past", *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, no. 617, 2008, pp. 166-180/p. 177.

[5] Elena DRAGOMIR, "Explaining Communist Nostalgia in Romania: Some Empirical Evidence", *Valahian Journal of Historical Studies*, no. 12, 2009, pp. 7-28; Joakim EKMAN, Jonas LINDE, "Communist Nostalgia and the Consolidation of Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe", *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, vol. 21, no. 3, 2011, pp. 354-374; IICCMER, "The Present-Day Perception on Communism...cit."); Vladimir TISMĂNEANU, "Democracy and Memory … cit.".

[6] Maya NADKARNI, Olga SHEVCHENKO, "The Politics of Nostalgia…cit.".

[7] Adam MICHNIK, "Dorul de comunism în România sau Polonia este ca dorul de Hitler sau Mussolini în Germania sau Italia". Interview broadcasted on 19 February 2011: http://www.tvr.ro/articol.php?id=97611&c=47 (accessed 5 June 2012).

However, as Bartmansky rightfully observes, "the link between nostalgia and the hardships of transformation is not sociologically sufficient"[1]. Otherwise, why would people long for a "failed reality they had just fled from"?[2]. It is not simply oblivion that keeps them attached to the past, as most nostalgics also remember the long queues, lack of material goods and other deficiencies they experienced during the former regime. When adding anthropological, ethnographic or cultural accounts into our attempt to grasp the phenomenon, various alternative explanations surface[3]. Several authors bring forward the feeling of alienation caused by a radical change – or what was coined as "liminal nostalgia"[4] with its "inevitable defence mechanism in a time of historical upheaval"[5]. In other words, nostalgia would serve "as a negotiation between continuity and discontinuity"[6], where the need of separation from a dark past is complemented by a necessity to still preserve fragments of that past, either because they relate to a personal memory or as a form of identification with a collective language. Herein resides the mourning for a "past communality that must be somehow restored"[7], along with a whole range of values which are thought to be lost. This is closely connected with the perspective on nostalgia as a particular form of "glocalization", expressing "a kind of resistance to globalization and its cultural homogenization"[8] which determines a tendency to bring back some of our past and tradition that are inexorably tied to our very post-communist present. As a result, an entire market evokes communist nostalgia: familiar socialist brands like the chocolate "Rom" or the shoes "Guban", old animated cartoons, vinyl discs and communist-like bars to kitschy representations of the Ceaușescu couple in commercials or ironical representations of communist stories in films and advertisements. Some are a combination of need for authenticity[9], others irony as detachment or defence against state-narratives[10] and yet others a necessity to reconstruct a lost cultural identity. But they all depict different forms of nostalgia which should be carefully understood before giving verdicts.

It is against this background that I will firstly argue that nostalgia is a distinctive phenomenon which one should avoid approaching with a moralising attitude. Along

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[1] Dominik BARTMANSKY, "Successful Icons…cit.", p. 215.

[2] *Ibidem*.

[3] Aleksandra GALASIŃSKA, Dariusz GALASIŃSKI, "Living Between History and The Present. The Polish Post-Communist Condition", in IDEM (eds.), *The Post-Communist Condition. Public and Private Discourses of Transformation*, John Benjamins Publishing Company, Amsterdam/Philadelphia, 2010, pp. 1-23.

[4] Narcis S. TULBURE, "Drinking and Nostalgia: Social Imagination in Postsocialist Romania", *Anthropology of East Europe Review*, vol. 24, no. 1, 2006, pp. 85-93.

[5] Svetlana BOYM, *The Future of Nostalgia*, Basic Books, New York, 2001, p. xiii.

[6] Nadia ATIA, Jeremy DAVIES, "Nostalgia and the Shapes of History …cit.", p. 184.

[7] Catherine KELLOGG, "Love and Communism: Jean-Luc Nancy's Shattered Community", *Law and Critique* no. 16, 2005, pp. 339-355/p. 340.

[8] Moonyoung LEE, "Nostalgia as a Feature of 'Glocalization'": Use of the Past in Post-Soviet Russia", *Post-Soviet Affairs*, vol. 27, no. 2, 2011, pp. 158-177/p. 159.

[9] Maya NADKARNI, "The Master's Voice: Authenticity, Nostalgia and the Refusal of the Postsocialist Hungary", *Social Identities*, vol. 13, no. 5, 2007, pp. 611-626.

[10] Diana GEORGESCU, "'Ceaușescu Hasn't Died'. Irony as Countermemory in Post-Socialist Romania", in Maria TODOROVA, Zsuzsa GILLE (eds.), *Post-Communist Nostalgia*, Berghahn Books, New York, 2010, pp. 155-176.

the arguments of Barbu[1], Buden[2], Cristea and Radu-Bucurenci[3], Spaskovska[4], Tulbure and Țichindeleanu[5], I state that nostalgia should be interpreted as a strong need to deal with the past, against the prominent anti-communist discourse which seems to consider the phenomenon either as dissatisfaction with the present, ignorance, emotional weakness or a result of neo-communist manipulation. The past should be accepted, discussed and presented in its multifaceted form, and not exorcised, as if it were a monster that accidentally got itself attached to Romanian history. In order to do so, this paper starts by explaining how nostalgia should be understood, beyond common views. It then analyses the mainstream discourses promoted by various Romanian opinion leaders in two crucial matters that are interconnected and best represent how this "settling with the past" is articulated: the official document condemning communism issued by the Presidential Commission for the Analysis of Communist Dictatorship in Romania[6] and the debates around building a National Museum of Communist Dictatorship in Romania. The former matter is crucial to understanding the official discourse of the Romanian government, while the latter best depicts not only the experience with the past, but the way the post-communist discourses articulate this experience, as Boris Buden observes[7]. Finally, it discusses the ways and implications of an alternative discourse by bringing forward mostly representations from cinema in which nostalgia plays a rather critical function which instead of cultivating forgetfulness and amnesia, might provide us with a broader understanding the past.

POSTCOMMUNIST NOSTALGIA – A COMPLEX PHENOMENON

A first attempt to define the concept invokes its initial use, that of longing for home: the Greek *nostos* ("return to the native land") along with *algos* ("suffering from grief") was proposed in the 17th century by the Swiss doctor Johannes Hofer as a certain type of wasting disease[8]. After being used predominantly in terms of a

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[1] Daniel BARBU, *Republica absentă. Politică și societate în România postcomunistă,* Nemira, București, 2004.

[2] Boris BUDEN, "În ghetele comunismului. Despre critica discursului postcomunist", 2011: http://www.criticatac.ro/9820/in-ghetele-comunismului-despre-critica-discursului-post-comunist/ (accessed 4 June 2012).

[3] Gabriela CRISTEA, Simina RADU-BUCURENCI , "Raising the Cross. Exorcising Romania's Communist Past in Museums, Memorials and Monuments, in Oksana SARKISOVA, Péter APOR (eds.), *Past for the Eyes. East European Representations of Communism in Cinema and Museums after 1989*, Central European University Pres, Budapest, New York, 2008, pp. 275-307.

[4] Ljubica SPASKOVSKA, "Recommunaissance: On the Phenomenon of Communist Nostalgia in Slovenia and Poland", *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures*, no. 17, 2008, pp. 136-150.

[5] Ovidiu ȚICHINDELEANU, "Modernitatea postcomunismului", *IDEA*, no. 24, 2006: http://idea.ro/revista/?q=ro/node/40&articol=404 (accessed 5 June 2012).

[6] Ovidiu ȚICHINDELEANU, "Modernitatea postcomunismului", *IDEA*, no. 24, 2006: http://idea.ro/revista/?q=ro/node/40&articol=404 (accessed 5 June 2012).

[7] Comisia prezidențială pentru analiza dictaturii comuniste din România, *Raport final*, București, 2006: http://www.presidency.ro/static/ordine/RAPORT_FINAL_CPADCR.pdf (accessed 5 June 2012).

[8] Boris BUDEN, "În ghetele comunismului… cit.".

medical condition, nostalgia gained new social and political implications, escaping individualities and becoming a form of generalised longing that came to be associated with the postmodern age[1]. Its logic, thus, starts with a significant loss: in the post-communist context, this is localised within a transition that began with a radical change, in which an old ideology and value systems were replaced with new ones and this very breach created feelings of abnormal instability, uncertainty and emptiness. So nostalgia as an answer to this change firstly embeds the recognition that a new order emerged and secondly the impossibility of re-experiencing the past. As Nadkarni and Shevchenko explain, "the perception of loss is the precondition for discourses of return and recovery"[2].

Consequently, nostalgia differs from reactionary politics which aim to reconstruct the past in the present. Most authors, starting with Svetlana Boym[3], have emphasised this essential difference: understanding nostalgia means distinguishing between its "restorative" and "reflective" character, that is, between the desire to re-enact a defunct regime into present, and the simple projection of a past that cannot be recuperated. In other terms, although people tend to re-evaluate some positive experiences from the past, they welcome the new regime as a lesser evil compared to the old one and do not endorse genuine nondemocratic values[4]. Similarly, even in Post-Soviet Russia, Belarus or Ukraine, researchers find a larger support for a market-based economy than a traditional, command economy[5].

In order to miss the past, one has to first gain some distance from it. For example, the re-emergence of "The Red Classics" in China as part of the literary and artistic work about the Chinese Revolution and the massive cultural production from the 1950s and 1970s[6] can only come as a mummified history which is now sold as a commodity and used by the state to imbue a 'patriotic" narrative of the recent past. Having accepted an irrevocable past, one can re-evaluate it by turning to old and new ideals: in this context, post-communist nostalgia comes as a desire to hold back to a failed utopia due to the painful experience of another.

> "If Western goods were endowed with a 'magical' and transformative capacity based on their perceived higher quality, unavailability and prestige (Coca-Cola, bananas, unlimited consumer choice) […] now, 'abundance of the few' recalls the allure of this fantasy and disappointment associated with its failure"[7].

This undoubtedly gives credit to those explaining nostalgia as a disappointment with the promises of the West. But it is more than that, for the past is not only

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[1] Nadia ATIA, Jeremy DAVIES, "Nostalgia and the Shapes of History …cit.".

[2] Linda HUTCHEON, "Irony, Nostalgia and the Postmodern", in Raymond VERVLIET, Annemarie ESTOR (eds), *Methods for the Study of Literature as Cultural Memory*, Rodopi, Amsterdam, 2000, pp. 189-207.

[3] Maya NADKARNI, Olga SHEVCHENKO, "The Politics of Nostalgia…cit.", p. 493.

[4] Svetlana BOYM, *The Future of Nostalgia*, cit.

[5] Richard ROSE,*Understanding Post-Communist Transformation. A Bottom-Up Approach.* Routledge, London and New York, 2009.

[6] Stephen WHITE, "Soviet Nostalgia and Russian Politics", *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, vol. 1, 2010, pp. 1-9.

[7] Kang LIU, "Reinventing the 'Red Classics' in the Age of Globalization", *Neohelicon*, no. 37, 2010, pp. 329-347.

idealised, but also criticised. It is in this dual nature of departure-mourning, continuity-discontinuity, past-present, utopia-reality that the phenomenon can be understood. More specifically, nostalgia reflects a need to deal with the past not by going back to it, for that is impossible, but by remembering, understanding and eventually integrating it into present. This attempt is even more difficult when the rupture is radical, which is why some authors use the term "liminal nostalgia" for something that is "no longer here, but not yet there"[1]. But it is precisely in this strive to regain some sense of moral direction or normality that nostalgia appears as

> "a form of resistance to the Manichean vision of the world essential for the teleology of transition, one that opposes what was *old/communist/bad* to what is supposed to be *new/capitalist/good*, expressed by people to whom the social changes of the 1990s meant the loss of material and symbolic security"[2].

So it is in opposition that communist nostalgia takes shape. Hence, the re-evaluation of what is lost: content analyses of written experiences in today's Russia contain frequent mentions of such losses – security, stability, solidarity or holidays[3].

What is at stake here is the extent to which the past can be made acceptable and intelligible for those who were socialised then. An attempt to understand it means looking at the cultural dimensions of post-communist nostalgia. Bartmansky, for instance, suggests we should explore (a) how material preservation of traces of a former life-world occurs, (b) how they are culturally recycled and (c) how they are symbolically canonised in everyday life[4]. So instead of trying to determine whether nostalgia is "real nostalgia" or something else, like amnesia, we should firstly look at its forms. That is to say that instead of putting the pejorative label on those who commonly say "It was better during Ceaușescu's times", one should carefully analyse what this means.

Following this observation, I shall further explore the main ways in which nostalgia can be observed in current post-communist countries. Ekman and Linde[5] establish two main indicators which create a matrix of four such dimensions:

- a political-ideological one (or "principle driven nostalgia" characterised by a disaffection with the principles of liberal democracy as an outcome of political socialisation),
- a socio-economical one (or "performance driven nostalgia", where the object triggering it is the dissatisfaction with system's ability to produce output, but not with the system itself),
- a personal socio-economic dimension (or "micro-economy driven nostalgia" caused by a loss of the paternalistic welfare state),
- a personal biography dimension (or "identity driven nostalgia" which would stem from favouring selective memories partly as a response to the depreciation of one's own life experience).

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[1] Maya NADKARNI, Olga SHEVCHENKO, "The Politics of Nostalgia…cit.", p. 495.

[2] Narcis S. TULBURE, "Drinking and Nostalgia…cit.", p. 91.

[3] *Ibidem*.

[4] Susan L HOLAK, Alexei V. MATVEEV, William J. HAVLENA, "Nostalgia in Post-Socialist Russia: Exploring Applications to Advertising Strategy", *Journal of Business Reasearch*, vol. 60, no. 7, 2007, pp. 649-655.

[5] Joakim EKMAN, Jonas LINDE, "Communist Nostalgia…cit.".

Such a classification, although it might be useful for a more rigorous operationalization, is both reductionist and incomplete: one the one hand, it reduces nostalgia to either "restorative politics of nostalgia" or perceived dissatisfaction (either systemic or personal); on the other, it fails to account for the nostalgia of young people who were not socialised during communism and yet seem to feel nostalgic about it.

Indeed, in Romania, like in all post-communist countries, positive feelings associated with the communist past have been noticed in opinion polls: almost half of Romanian teenagers educated after 1989 believe that the communist period was better than today, with two thirds considering there was a higher respect for the law back then[1]. To account for this, one has to consider a sort of post-modern or "armchair nostalgia"[2], that is a "nostalgia without melancholy" understood as a "fashionability of socialist historicity itself with the generation too young to have concrete memories of state socialism"[3]. Herein the aura of pastness itself or a generalised retro feeling goes hand in hand with the commodification of communism as a mixture of curiosity and irony for something which used to be authentic. Interesting examples are "La Scânteia"[4] or "Atelier Mecanic"[5] (The mechanical workshop) – two Bucharest bars frequented by young people or foreign tourists, which bring back communism through pictures, advertisements, messages, products and music. By this, they take a step back from it while reviving forms of selective memory which create both irony and material for evaluation. As Bartmansky observes, this form of nostalgia implies "a considerable degree of detached irony and self-conscious distance on the part of both promoters and consumers of the repackaged communist icons"[6]. And this is another proof of the way permeability of a past into post-communist countries works. When looking at lyrics in songs such as "Ceaușescu n-a murit" ("Ceaușescu hasn't died") written and sang by Ada Milea, a well-known contemporary folk artist, Georgescu explores the richness of ironic messages that allow them to "perform memory work and socio-political critiques simultaneously":

> "They might, for example, reenact the ideological atmosphere of late communism as a means to criticise unacknowledged complicities between national pride and Socialist propaganda (Ada Milea), expose continuities in political culture from communist to post-Communist regimes, or encourage social responsibility and civic virtues in their audiences"[7].

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[1] Fundația Soros România, "Trecutul comunist în conștiința adolescenților. Comunicat de presă", 2010: http://www.soros.ro/ro/comunicate_detaliu.php?comunicat=153_(accessed 5 June 2012).

[2] Linda HUTCHEON, "Irony, Nostalgia and the Postmodern… cit.".

[3] Maya NADKARNI, Olga SHEVCHENKO, "The Politics of Nostalgia…cit.", pp. 501-502.

[4] Inspired by the name of the famous communist newspaper *Scânteia*, which was revived by the members of the New Romanian Communist Party: http://www.adevarul.ro/actualitate/eveniment/Ziarul_comunist_-Scanteia-_renaste_pe_Internet_0_514148889.html (accessed 5 June 2012). For an overview of the pub, see http://metropotam.ro/Unde-iesim/La-Scanteia-petrecere-rock-la-restaurantul-comunist-Sau-invers-art0752259021/ (accessed 5 June 2012).

[5] See http://metropotam.ro/Unde-iesim/Bar-Atelier-Mecanic-art9580637906/ (accessed 5 June 2012).

[6] D. BARTMANSKY, "Successful Icons …cit.", p. 218.

[7] Diana GEORGESCU, "'Ceaușescu Hasn't Died'…cit.", p. 171.

Other expressions of nostalgia refer to: the commodification of official symbols of communist ideology (from medals and coins to typical scouts' clothing and souvenirs), "Proustiana" or the revival of brands promoted through marketing (such as old products with evocative, familiar names) and "habitus of late socialism" – such as practices which used to compose everyday life and try to recover now some form of lost communality. So unlike the "post-modern nostalgia" characterising those who were never socialised in that past, but still are influenced by it, these forms of nostalgia recall a discourse of cultural belonging and, thus, its associated "competence of deciphering a cultural inheritance"[1].

To sum up at this point, nostalgia is a multifaceted phenomenon that cannot be exclusively understood in connection with dissatisfaction with the present, nor can it be put exclusively under the small umbrella of amnesia or ignorance. Undoubtedly, there is a form of idealisation and selective memory which revives a utopian past against the misery of reality. But it is exactly the very remembrance of a forgotten past which is irrevocably lost that permits so many forms to permeate the present. They are not entirely true, nor entirely fake. Some are proofs of authenticity; some are re-contextualised in a way that implies detachment and critical analysis, while others are evocative of personal experiences which can only be understood through a specific collective memory which is emotionally and politically charged.

Furthermore, one has to distinguish modern or post-modern forms of nostalgia from their politics: that is, the way they are used to revive national myths that might indeed lead to more authoritarian forms of government. Lee, for instance, names this very relationship between power and the past "the politics of nostalgia" which implicitly raises the issue of national identity[2]. In Putin's Russia, the author explains, the ways in which people relate to a past is exploited and monopolised by the regime as a form of "glocalization" or reshaping and reassessing a proud national identity against the process of globalisation. Other scholars confirm that "the Kremlin has reinvented historic narratives of the Soviet period to advance the notion of Russia's enduring greatness and foster a sense of patriotism"[3]. The conveyed message here is that national culture prevails against political history[4]. As a result, a glorified history erasing the dark past and operating through oblivion is propagated in order to reanimate national patriotism. The inherent danger of the politics of nostalgia is, thus, glorifying a repressive regime, as it happened in Germany with the PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism), a successor of the former GDR state party SED (Socialist Unity Party of Germany): here, the party used the *Ostalgie* phenomenon (or "nostalgia for the East") to secure a stable electoral basis in the Eastern German federal states in the first 15 years after reunification[5]. In Romania, however, the need for writing a "true" history after 1990 naturally had to oppose the nationalistic greatness cultivated during communism and, thus, deconstructing, de-mythologising perspectives

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[1] Maya NADKARNI, Olga SHEVCHENKO, "The Politics of Nostalgia…cit.", p. 502.

[2] Moonyoung LEE, "Nostalgia as a Feature of 'Glocalization'"…cit.", p. 161.

[3] Olena NIKOLAYENKO, "Contextual Effects on Historical Memory: Soviet Nostalgia Among Post-Soviet Adolescents", *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, no. 41, 2008, pp. 243-259/p. 254.

[4] Ilya KALININ, "Nostalgic Modernization: the Soviet Past as 'Historical Horizon'", *Slavonica*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2011, pp. 156-166.

[5] Aline SIERP, "Nostalgia for Times Past. On the Uses and Abuses of the Ostalgie Phenomenon in Eastern Germany", *Contemporary European Studies*, no. 2, 2009, pp. 47-60.

surfaced in post-communist historiography, reshaping national history that entered school curricula[1].

Consequently, the Romanian official discourse regarding nostalgia takes a similar path which, paradoxically, acts against its very intentions and while advocating for collective memory to be "accurately revived" and serving as a form of moral retribution for the victims of communism, it also blocks that collective memory from understanding its past and forces upon it a singular version of reality.

PUBLIC DISCOURSES IN ROMANIA ABOUT COMMUNIST NOSTALGIA

Democratisation in Romania followed a slow and controversial path starting with the first government established after the revolution. It is not the purpose of this paper to present a detailed account of the process. But it is important to recall that post-communist history has been plagued by instability, controversy as testified by Ion Iliescu's regimes (1990-1996; 2000-2004), the miners' violent acts, governmental crises, ethnic tensions), and slow reforms[2]. Moreover, there were several attempts to "purify" the present such as the study of the Securitate Archives with which the National College for the Study of the Former "Securitate" Archives (CNSAS) was entrusted, a highly debated Lustration Law which ultimately resulted in a selective exposure of ex-collaborators with the Securitate and a strong shift to an anti-communist discourse. If one is to characterise the success of transitional justice, one will not be mistaken when concluding that just like in Hungary, this has been used primarily for political manipulation by political actors[3].

Formalising the Anti-communist Discourse

In 2006, the publication of the final report of the Presidential Commission for the Study of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania represented a form of closure to the search for justice on the basis of which President Traian Băsescu could condemn communism. This 665-pages long document elaborated by well-known historians and other experts characterises the communist regime as "illegitimate and criminal" and strives to restore a sense of justice for communist victims. In doing so, the report also attacks non-democratic, neo-communist forces that are blamed for remaining active and slowing down the transition process. The also-called "Tismăneanu" report (named after the political scientist Vladimir Tismăneanu who presided at the

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[1] Cristina PETRESCU, Dragoș PETRESCU, "Mastering vs. Coming to Terms with the Past: A Critical Analysis of Post-Communist Romanian Historiography", in Sorin ANTOHI, Balázs TRENCSÉNYI, Péter APOR (eds.), *Narratives Unbound. Historical Studies in Post-Communist Eastern* Europe, Central European University Press, Budapest, 2007, pp. 311-408.

[2] Carmen TĂNĂSOIU, "Intellectuals and Post-Communist Politics in Romania: An Analysis of Public Discourse, 1990-2000", *East European Politics and Societies*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2008, pp. 80-113.

[3] Csilla KISS, "The Misuses of Manipulation: The Failure of Transitional Justice in Post-Communist Hungary", *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 58, no. 6, 2006, pp. 925-940.

Commission) recommended various paths to memorialise and prevent a restoration of similar atrocities. They all reiterate the necessity "to present the truth, as it really happened" to future generations and a continuous remembrance of the fact that "denying communist crimes is just as unacceptable as denying the fascist crimes"[1].

Vladimir Tismăneanu himself bemoaned that the condemnation of the communist dictatorship became one of the most hotly debated issues in contemporary Romania. Firstly, it stirred criticism from those very extremist nationalist parties and ex-nomenklatura members that were blamed by the report. Secondly, it was criticised by others for being just a formal way of "settling with the past" in the absence of a proper decommunisation, while also being hypocritically used as a political weapon by the Democratic Liberal Party to appeal to victims. And finally, it led to a radicalization of an anti-communist discourse which is challenged mostly by intellectuals with leftist views as a form of canonising a unilateral, non-debatable "truth"[2]. So at this point, the public memory as defined by political agents is imposed onto the social memory that reflects the way society at large interprets the past. As Preda suggests, the official memory has to do with transitional justice and thus, concerns only the victims[3]. However, people live unofficial histories and this makes the abstract "social memory" something quite different than the formalised version of memory, as expressed by the government.

To explore various public narratives regarding the issue of post-communist nostalgia, I conducted discourse analyses on a sample of over 50 articles published since 2006 until 2011 in various media, including cultural reviews, generalist newspapers and professional online platforms which discussed the topic of post-communist nostalgia in connection with the final report and the more recent topic, of building a Museum of Communist Dictatorship in Romania. I argue that both subjects are relevant in understanding the various public discourses and polarising positions outlined by different opinion leaders, as well as in setting a future way of dealing with post-communist nostalgia. If the former subject sends an official message to Romanian citizens and the entire world that communism must be eradicated from the present, the latter shows how different actors understand and challenge this official discourse, by trying to answer the question: How should we regard the past? A state-funded Museum of Communist Dictatorship would, then, be precisely the representation of how one *should* relate to the past.

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[1] Comisia prezidențială pentru analiza dictaturii comuniste din România, *Raport final*, cit., p. 641.

[2] See Florin ABRAHAM, "Muzeul Comunismului sau Muzeul Dictaturilor? Critica tendințelor hegemonice în interpretarea trecutului", *Critic Atac*, September 2011: http://www.criticatac.ro/9712/muzeul-comunismului-sau-muzeul-dictaturilor-critica-tendintelor-hegemonice-in-interpretarea-trecutului/ (accessed 5 June 2012); Alexandru POLGAR, "Restul comunist", *Critic Atac*, October 2010: http://www.criticatac.ro/1775/restul-comunist/ (accessed 5 June 2012); Ovidiu ȚICHINDELEANU, "Modernitatea postcomunismului", cit. For a detailed analysis of the report issued by the Presidential Commission, see Monica CIOBANU, "Criminalising the Past and Reconstructing Collective Memory: The Romanian Truth Commission", *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 62, no. 2, 2009, pp. 313-336.

[3] Caterina PREDA, "Looking at The Past Through An Artistic Lens: Art of Memorialization", in *History of Communism in Europe. Politics of Memory in Post-communist Europe*, vol. 1, Zeta Books, București, 2010, pp. 129-148: http://unibuc.academia.edu/CaterinaPreda/Papers/538711/Looking_at_the_past_through_an_artistic_lens_art_of_memorialization (accessed 14 June 2012).

The sample includes editorials, opinion articles, interviews and reports that give voice to a whole range of writers, journalists, historians, sociologists who were vocal during debates regarding the fate of "post-communist anti-communism" in Romania. The arguments outline the main clash between an official anti-communist discourse and alternative positions or anti-anti-communist discourses, be they radical-moralising, leftist or simply critical towards the politicisation of the anti-communist discourse.

To begin with, the 2006 moment meant an open and non-negotiable position that the official Romanian representatives took upon themselves: a moral-symbolic action that would be "putting an end to nostalgia for an alleged period of greatness and independence, and embracing the country's de facto cultural pluralism and European future"[1]. So from the very beginning, in the official discourse nostalgia is regarded as pejorative. It is diversionary and even dangerous, for it symbolises indulging oneself into a failed utopia and slipping back, into a past that has nothing to do with the present. This view polarised the Romanian public sphere into mainly two camps: the pro-president Băsescu (and his "clique of intellectuals") versus the ones against him, generally from the political spectrum of the nationalist Great Romania party, the Social Democratic Party (PSD) and Conservative Party (PC). The discourse was, thus, firstly politicised, shifting the focus from understanding the truth toward "who owns the truth and who gave him that right?".

Secondly, when moving away from the political sphere, the positions tended to diversify: the rightist intellectuals condemn the need to resort to old utopias of those who seek to legitimise their power. They regard socialism as an expired and failed paradigm which should not be revived. In a dialogue between the Romanian-born Nobel-prize winner for literature Herta Müller and the prominent philosopher and writer Gabriel Liiceanu, the problem of nostalgia is coined as "oblivion":

> "If we think about the post-communist nostalgia which exists in all Eastern European countries, how can we explain it? Why this nostalgia, if people have learned something under dictatorship? Some didn't learn anything because were part of the system and dislike being told that 'they participated'"[2].

When asked to explain recent opinion polls signalising the existence of post-communist nostalgia in Romania, the theologian Radu Preda reacted vehemently:

> "Ultimately, such a melancholy shows the lack of education and self-complacent identity schizophrenia. We love *manele* and regret communism! We evade taxes imposed by the current state and regret the communist state!"[3].

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[1] Vladimir TISMĂNEANU, "Democracy and Memory; Romania…cit.", p. 177.

[2] Gabriel LIICEANU, "Interviu cu Herta Müller: Limba celor care nu scriu și 'tâmpita de patrie'", *Dilema veche*, no. 347, 2010: http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2011-05-26-mullerliiceanu-ro.html (accessed 9 June 2012).

[3] Interview with Radu PREDA: "Cine regretă comunismul înseamnă că nu știe ce să facă în democrație", *Ziua de Cluj,* February, 2011: http://ziuadecj.realitatea.net/eveniment/radu-preda-cine-regreta-comunismul-inseamna-ca-nu-stie-ce-sa-faca-in-democratie--60846.html (author's translation) (accessed 9 June 2012).

The French sociologist and anthropologist teaching in Romania, Claude Karnoouh concludes in an article about the bankrupt ideology of a clandestine Romanian Communist Party:

> "The future cannot build itself through nostalgia and resentment, but on the firm belief that everything has to be taken from ground zero, at the expense of any repetitions. Because Marxists, more or less orthodox, more or less Nitzchean, Lukácsian, Heideggerian, had found long before that the essence of modernity holds a future with no image, that now and forever 'Tomorrow is another day'"[1].

Similar views are shared by other personalities who dismiss nostalgia as a dangerous and ill-fated phenomenon which characterises rather the masses who chose basic necessities at the expense of basic rights (Laurențiu Nicolae) or as a cynical truth that the majority still wants to be governed by a paternalistic state (Mihnea Măruță)[2].

Opposite Discourses: Anti-anti-communist Positions

The typical positioning of those personally committed to do justice to victims was that of moral radicalism and total rejection of anything communist (Marius Oprea, Lucia-Hossu Longin[3]). This meant turning against former colleagues like Tismăneanu who was accused of moral improbity and became subject of debates about his communist past and "politicised anti-communist discourse" ever since. So partially, the narratives shifted from contents to persons, from exposing "the objective truth" to searching for guilt. In this context, Alex. Matei distinguishes the "intellectuals of pathos" reflecting a "post-communist anti-communist discourse" with representatives like Gabriel Liiceanu, Horia R. Patapievici, Vladimir Tismăneanu and Valeriu Stoica from the post-Enlightenment, "intellectuals of ethos", like Ciprian Șiulea and Caius Dobrescu[4]. The criticism against the "politicised anti-communist discourse" assumes

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[1] Claude KARNOOUTH, "Partidul Comunist Român – înviat sau dus la groapă?", Fundația Culturală Română, July 2010: http://revistacultura.ro/nou/2010/07/partidul-comunist-roman-inviat-sau-dus-la-groapa/ (author's translation) (accessed 9 June 2012).

[2] Laurențiu NICOLAE, "Editorial – Ipocrizia nostalgiei comuniste", *Cotidianul*, April 2006: http://old.cotidianul.ro/editorial_ipocrizia_nostalgiei_comuniste-10254.html (accessed 9 June 2012); Mihnea MĂRUȚĂ, "O altă explicație pentru nostalgia comunismului", August, 2010: http://mihneamaruta.ro/2010/08/02/o-alta-explicatie-pentru-nostalgia-comunismului/ (accessed 9 June 2012).

[3] Marius OPREA, "Muzeul 'Vladimir Tismăneanu'", *Observator Cultural*, no. 587, August 2010: http://www.observatorcultural.ro/Muzeul-Vladimir-Tismaneanu*articleID_25745-articles_details.html (accessed 9 June 2012); Lucia-HOSSU LONGIN, "Nu doresc să lucrez într-un muzeu al figurilor de ceară", *Observator Cultural*, no. 514, February 2010: http://www.observatorcultural.ro/Nu-doresc-sa-lucrez-intr-un-muzeu-al-figurilor-de-ceara*articleID_23314-articles_details.html (accessed 9 June 2012); IDEM, "În viziunea Palatului Cotroceni: un muzeu al comunismului 'mai relaxat'?!", *Observator Cultural*, no. 585, July 2011: http://www.observatorcultural.ro/In-viziunea-Palatului-Cotroceni-un-muzeu-al-comunismului-mai-relaxat*articleID_25666-articles_details.html (accessed 9 June 2012).

[4] According to Paul CERNAT, "Romantismul ideologic sub tratament. Alexandru Matei: Mormântul comunismului românesc. 'Romantismul revoluționar' înainte și după 1989",

not a leftist, but an antagonistic position from a non-ideological basis which says "anti-communism, just as communism has been wrongfully confiscated by political powers". Ciprian Șiulea, for instance, goes as far as to argue that when drawing the line,

> "the most sinister thing after the fall of communism in Romania was anti-communism, as it was instrumentalised by 'smart' cultural and, recently, political characters. Now, from my point of view, I have great doubts that the Pharisees of communism could have ever surpassed in hypocrisy the Pharisees of anti-communism"[1].

Here, instead of dealing with an ideological opposition between left and right, the argument of confiscating the anti-communist discourse by political and some cultural elites emerges. The positioning simply deplores the over-moralising discourse of those who condemn communism which is deemed unauthentic. So the critique is not against a mere "anti-communist discourse", but against a politicised one. Daniel Barbu, for instance, deplored the ease with which Romanian intellectuals hurried to condemn communism: "After 1989, Romania seemed dominated by a new moral and political conformism, expressed as a stereotypical and conventional pathos of denouncing the totalitarian past"[2]. Thus, a strong condemnation would be "an illegitimate competence" of intellectuals who witnessed Romanian communism[3].

Both camps seem to agree with one fact: Romanian political elites during transition inherit the legacy from the Securitate-members who still hold key-positions. So a moral rehabilitation of all those acknowledging this truth and having suffered from it is crucial. Those opposing a firm anti-communist stance are either those very neo-communist or nationalist activists who were still left as a residue in the system, or those who indulge with forgetfulness, kitschy communist "belch" and trivial nostalgias[4]. This is the paradigmatic discourse that tries to exorcise nostalgia from everyday life as if it were an amnesic parasite which left the masses baffled. But within this "camp" there are tensions between the more activist representatives who refuse to be associated with any political power and perceive their attempt as purely a form of moral justice for the victims, like Marius Oprea or Lucia Hossu-Longin and those who support a political power, regardless of its moral legitimacy, precisely because it legitimises the liberal, rightist discourse.

Against this camp, one can notice two main types of discourse which share a similar position, but also differ in their ideological basis: one "condemns the condemnation" because of its hypocritical attempt to reveal a truth which instead of being integrated, is used as a political instrument; the other one condemns the very anti-communist discourse for adopting a radical position that mistakenly confuses "truth" with a moralising truth of the rightist, Western-like elites who confiscate a

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Observator Cultural, no. 591, September 2011: http://www.observatorcultural.ro/Romantismul-ideologic-sub-tratament*articleID_25841-articles_details.html (author's translation) (accessed 9 June 2012).

[1] Ciprian ȘIULEA, "Ce rămâne după ce tragem linia", *Critic Atac*, November 2010: http://www.criticatac.ro/2991/ce-ramine-dupa-ce-tragem-linia/ (accessed 9 June 2012).

[2] Daniel BARBU, *Republica absentă*, cit., p. 107 (author's translation).

[3] *Ibidem*.

[4] Răsvan LALU, "Supa reîncălzită", *Madame Blogary*, February 2011: http://www.blogary.ro/2011/02/supa-reincalzita/ (accessed 9 June 2012).

collective memory by putting a definitive label on it. An edifying example for these critical positions regarding the formalisation of the anti-communist discourse is the publication of a collective volume which remained largely unnoticed: *The Illusion of Anti-communism*[1]. It is here that most authors invoked criticise the official intent of the Presidential Commission: "condemnation is the intellectual substitute of repression", answers Ovidiu Țichindeleanu[2], one of the coordinators of the book in an interview. The book does not plan to elevate leftist opinions, nor does it defend other past or present ideologies or nostalgias. However, its purpose was not understood as such by the opposite camp, with proponents of the anti-communist discourse condemning the lack of a wholehearted acceptance of such a discourse: on his blog, Vladimir Tismăneanu qualifies the book as "unequal, dominated by ambitions which overcome the real interpretive capacities of some of its contributors" and chooses to publish an "applied analytical essay, informed and peremptory" signed by the writer and poet Angela Furtună[3]. In her acid critique, she combines selected personal biographies with subjective judgements, equating "communist nostalgias" with "ideological drugs" and critiques of anti-communism with cheap leftist ideas. The critique is, thus, dismissed as narcissistic and dangerous, since it voices a world lacking strong moral verdicts, full of ambiguity and uncertainty[4].

Contestations of the post-communist anti-communist discourse are further reinforced in the debates concerning the building of a National Museum of Communist Dictatorship in Romania, a recommendation of the report itself and a hotly debated topic in the last months of 2011. The intention was announced by the ex-minister of Foreign Affairs, Teodor Baconschi, at the request of the Liberal Democratic Party (PDL) – the governing party at the time – and president Traian Băsescu himself[5]. Again, started as a state-funded project, this stirred debates around the ways in which the past should be commemorated. The polarisation has been radical, with the anti-communist discourse being strongly criticised for both its political, ideological basis and anti-leftist implications. The main clash regarded the purpose of such a museum – would it be another Memorial for the victims of communism, thus risking to eclipse

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[1] Original title: *Iluzia anticomunismului. Lecturi critice ale Raportului Tismăneanu*, Cartier, Chișinău, 2008. The book is coordinated by Vasile Ernu, Costi Rogozanu, Ciprian Șiulea and Ovidiu Țichindeleanu, and includes contributions from o dozen of authors reclaiming the need for an open debate regarding collective memory and history. For a brief context of the book, see http://www.criticatac.ro/10988/criticatac-antologie-i-primul-volum-criticatac/ (accessed 9 June 2012).

[2] Ovidiu ȘIMONCA, Ovidiu ȚICHINDELEANU, Vasile ERNU, Costi ROGOZANU, Ciprian ȘIULEA, "O carte în dezbatere", *Observator cultural*, no. 191, November 2008: http://www.romaniaculturala.ro/articol.php?cod=11333 (accessed 9 June 2012).

[3] Vladimir TISMĂNEANU, "Demistificarea 'Iluziei anticomunismului'", June 2009: http://tismaneanu.wordpress.com/2009/06/05/demistificarea-iluziei-anticomunismului/ (accessed 9 June 2012).

[4] Angela FURTUNĂ, "De la iluzia anticomunismului la halucinația anistorică", May 2009: http://tismaneanu.wordpress.com/2009/06/05/demistificarea-iluziei-anticomunismului/ (accessed 9 June 2012).

[5] *Critic Atac* (editorial board in collaboration with protokoll.ro), Topic: "De ce un Muzeu al comunismului", November 2011: http://www.criticatac.ro/9704/tema-de-ce-un-muzeu-al-comunismului/ (accessed 9 June 2012).

the Sighet Memorial which already serves this purpose?[1]. Or should it rather be an artistic attempt that would combine both tragic stories of victims and personal biographies accounting for life under communism in general?

The question is crucial, since it deals with the troubling mixture of history with memory. When recalling Hallbwach's triangle (individual, collective and historic memory), Michael Shafir argues that personal memory tends to be stronger than that of historiography particularly in transition societies[2]. So to address the question of a communist memorial is no easy task for a transitional society that still has to come to terms with its past.

Clearly the official discourse favours the idea of a memorial for the victims of communism:

> "Just as the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, this musem will be both a place of memorialisation and of affirming the values of an open society […] In addition it is necessary to create an open centre for public information that would collect important documents for understanding the communist phenomenon, the 'concentration camp' and propaganda as a means to spiritual constraint".

Alternative narratives argue for a more nuanced story that would recall the life under communism in general. In this latter case, the main arguments invoked concern the illegitimacy of a moralising discourse formalised by a controversial government (or the anti-politicisation of anti-communist discourse) with voices represented by Ciprian Șiulea, Sever Voinescu or Florin Abraham, the fact that mummification of the past would symbolise a clear detachment from communism which is very much present today (or the apolitical anti-communist discourse) advocated by Lucia Hossu-Longin and Marius Oprea and the fact that a unilateral version of the truth, as proposed by the official discourse, would impede seeking for alternative versions of the which meant something more than a total repression (or the non-moralising illegitimate discourse) supported by Daniel Barbu, Vintilă Mihăilescu[3], Vasile Ernu[4], Ovidiu

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[1] Cristina DOBREANU, "Muzeul national al comunismului va eclipsa memorialul de la Sighet", *România Liberă*, July 2011: http://www.romanialibera.ro/actualitate/eveniment/muzeul-national-al-comunismului-va-eclipsa-memorialul-de-la-sighet-232677.html (accessed 10 June 2012).

[2] Michael SHAFIR, "Memory and Hisotry in Postcommunism. Preliminary Theoretical Remarks", *Sfera Politicii*, no. 120-21-122, 2006: http://www.sferapoliticii.ro/sfera/120-121-122/art21-shafir.html (accessed 10 June 2012).

[3] See Vintilă MIHĂILESCU, "Muzeul dictaturii vs muzeul comunismului", *Dilema Veche*, no. 346, October 2010: http://dilemaveche.ro/sectiune/tilc-show/articol/muzeul-dictaturii-vs-muzeul-comunismului (accessed 10 June 2012); IDEM, "Muzeul comunismului, dincolo de bine și rău", *Critic Atac*, September 2011: http://www.criticatac.ro/9721/muzeul-comunismului-dincolo-de-bine-si-rau/ (accessed 10 June 2012).

[4] Vasile ERNU, "Muzeul Comunismului: povestea celor din Primăverii spusă celor din Ferentari", *Critic Atac*, August 2011: http://www.criticatac.ro/9706/muzeul-comunismului-povestea-celor-din-primaverii-spusa-celor-din-ferentari/ (accessed 10 June 2012); Mihail VAKULOVSKI, Interview with Vasile ERNU: "Stăpânii s-au schimbat, sclavii au rămas aceiași!", *Tiuk*, July 2011: http://www.tiuk.reea.net/13/ernu_int.vklvsk.html (accessed 10 June 2012).

Gherasim-Proca[1], Ovidiu Ţinchindeleanu or Dan Ungureanu[2]. Activists and political dissidents aside, the alternative narratives all converge toward the non-moralising perspective that is perceived as hypocritical and detrimental to understanding and accepting the truth in all its complexity.

Herein, strong affirmations from intellectuals with leftist views emerge:

> "Communism receives a total, absolute meaning, being confined to a sphere of darkness and failure and ontologically separated from the capitalist world, which is good, civilised and efficient. This bizarre ideological breach is the one which fragments and makes impossible the construction of a common meaning against the passive acceptance of the global logic of capitalism, legitimised by the paranoiac suspicion of total eradication of communist totalitarianism from the abysses of the present"[3].

In this perspective, the anti-communist discourse is criticised on the basis of its very ideological stance which ultimately legitimises the replacement of a utopia (communism) with another (capitalism) and implicitly gives no chance to a moderate socialist paradigm to survive in Europe. Focused on an uncritical acceptance of Eurocentrism, Western liberalism and capitalism, this argument sophisticates the debate, by bringing forward the consequences of condemning post-communist nostalgia itself. In other words, "to replace the official Ceauşescu history with an anti-communist, official history is just another ideological totalitarianism. The elitist mentality of Noica's second generation disciples is a reversed totalitarianism"[4].

Similarly, Alexandru Polgar accusses the government of being only party democratic by condemning everything communist, while silently accepting legionary elements and the glorification of fascist representatives like Ion Antonescu. The author thus deplores the dead-end of a moral judgement that we are officially require to exercise when dealing with the past:

> "The cultural anti-communist war installs and neutralises through prohibitive 'museumification', the symbolic interdiction to grasp communism in other ways and according to different coordinates than those advocated by nowadays official anti-communists. We are witnessing a genuine *tabu-isation*, thus, which only those vaguely interested in a coherent democratic position would believe that it merely functions out of redeeming spirit"[5].

What would be the solution, then, for settling with the past? Anthropologists, journalists and writers like Vintilă Mihăilescu, Ovidiu Gherasim-Proca, Florin

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[1] Ovidiu GHERASIM-PROCA, "Monumentul unei victorii imposibile", *Critic Atac*, September 2011: http://www.criticatac.ro/9726/monumentul-unei-victorii-imposibile/ (accessed 10 June 2012).

[2] Dan UNGUREANU, "Muzeul comunismului – butaforie a superiorităţii morale", *Revista Cultura*, August 2011: http://revistacultura.ro/blog/2011/08/muzeul-comunismului-butaforie-a-superioritatii-morale/ (accessed 10 June 2012).

[3] Ovidiu ŢICHINDELEANU, "Modernitatea postcomunismului…cit." (author's translation).

[4] Dan UNGUREANU, "Muzeul comunismului – butaforie a superiorităţii morale", *Revista Cultura*, August 2011: http://revistacultura.ro/blog/2011/08/muzeul-comunismului-butaforie-a-superioritatii-morale/ (accessed 10 June 2012).

[5] Alexandru POLGAR, "Restul comunist", cit.

Poenaru[1] or Vasile Ernu seek for a more flexible approach that would accommodate both condemning the past and integrating in into our cultural identity, without assuming any ideological perspective. As such, a museum should firstly be "an artistic object"[2] and secondly a "social object" that would also re-present everyday life during that period in order to make it comprehensible. In the end, communism was possible because of all those who participated in a way or another at its construction, not only because of victims and their perpetrators[3].

Between these two positions with their specific nuances, the discourse on post-communist nostalgia takes shape. We are, thus, firstly advised to officially exorcise it. To use the words of Cristea and Radu-Bucurenci (2008), the future museum would represent "a place where demons are exorcised, visitors are frightened to death, victims become martyrs and no third way is offered between victim and perpetrator; no questions, no dilemmas, no doubts, only answers"[4]. So we are also unofficially invited to expose these dilemmas and express nostalgia as a genuine recognition of who we are. It is exactly this contradiction that explains the very nature of post-communist nostalgia.

Ultimately, I argue that instead of choosing a camp or another, we should allow the possibility of debate, beyond the official anti-communist discourse. In other words, I affirm that, although it is a difficult task to achieve due to the controversial and polarising narratives about post-communist nostalgia, it is not impossible to accommodate various forms of nostalgia as alternative means to grasp a dark past. This neither implies glorifying the communist regime, nor eradicating it completely from our present, but integrating in while detaching ourselves from its residual failed ideals. I, thus, further suggest looking at alternative practices that are neither leftist, nor "nostalgic" in the pejorative meaning, but both signs of a genuine need (to comprehend the past) and expressions of this need (to detach from it, while recognising its many shapes and learning how to integrate them into our present).

TOWARD ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVES ABOUT COMMUNISM

When analysing various forms of nostalgia in post-communist societies, there are also several ways of dealing with a controversial past. Namely, the re-presentation of communism in cinema and other cultural products as means to both recuperate some authenticity and understand the past in all its ironies and contradictions, serve as alternative paths to the official "exorcism" verdict. By discussing these examples, I intend to challenge the very tendency to "disqualify alternative practices of remembrance as revivals of communism"[5]. In other words, what I bring forward is not a "restorative" form of nostalgia, but a "reflective" one.

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[1] Florin POENARU, "Un muzeu pentru hipsteri", *Critic Atac*, September 2011: http://www.criticatac.ro/10017/un-muzeu-pentru-hipsteri/ (accessed 10 June 2012); IDEM, "Nostalgie, pedagogie, umor sau despre a adoua venire a anti-comunismului", *Critic Atac*, October 2010: http://www.criticatac.ro/2034/nostalgie-pedagogie-umor-sau-despre-a-doua-venire-a-anti-comunismului/ (accessed 10 June 2012).

[2] Ioana VRĂBIESCU, "Atenție la exponate! Sunt încă în viață", *Critic Atac*, October 2011: http://www.criticatac.ro/9996/atentie-la-exponate-sunt-inca-in-viata/ (accessed 10 June 2012).

[3] Vintilă MIHĂILESCU, "Muzeul dictaturii vs muzeul comunismului", cit.

[4] Gabriela CRISTEA, Simina RADU-BUCURENCI , "Raising the Cross…cit.", p. 305.

[5] Katja KREBS, "Book review: Maria TODOROVA, Zsuzsa GILLE (eds.), *Post-Communist Nostalgia*. Berghahn Books, New York, 2010", *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 14, no. 4, 2011, pp. 468-470/p. 470.

One of the most discussed such representations is Wolfgang Becker's film *Good Bye Lenin!* (2003, Wolfgang Becker) which deconstructs *Ostalgia* and deems it a coping mechanism. In her analysis of the German film, Godeanu-Kensworthy argues that it does so "by exposing the deep collective needs to which this phenomenon responds" and by emerging as "a powerful argument in favour of the healing potential behind the phenomenon of *Ostalgia* which can benefit both East and West in their search for a common national identity and common understanding of recent history"[1]. The film shows the past through a young man's eyes (Alex) who tries to revive East Germany in order to keep his mother, who suffered a shock and woke up after a long coma, from learning that her country as she knew it had disappeared over night. Bringing back East Germany's commodities, practices, and language, the film plays on the emotional bonds with the lost consumer products of the GDR[2] and works as a counter-anti-communist discourse. In this sense, communist nostalgia seems to embed a will to "make peace with the past, deal with it, react to the present and encounter the repressed memory"[3].

Romanian post-communism also offers a whole range of examples in which communism plays a background role and is an object of irony, humour, remembrance and moral evaluation. As such, cinematic representations like *The Paper Will Be Blue* (*Hârtia va fi albastră*, by Radu Muntean, 2006), *The Way I Spent the End of The World* (*Cum mi-am petrecut sfârșitul lumii,* by Cătălin Mitulescu, 2006), *12.08 East of Bucharest* (*A fost sau n-a fost*, by Corneliu Porumboiu, 2006), *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* (Cristian Mungiu, 2007), *Silent Wedding* (*Nuntă Mută,* by Horațiu Mălăele, 2008), *Tales from The Golden Age* (*Amintiri din Epoca de Aur,* written by Cristian Mungiu, 2009) or *The Autobiography of Nicolae Ceaușescu* (Andrei Ujică, 2011) depict alternative paths against the univocal anti-communist discourse and stir the necessity of searching for answers and facing our dilemma.

In *The Way I Spent the End of The World* the director Cătălin Mitulescu challenges the spectators in an ambiguous way: on the one hand, it "awakens the demons of a detestable past" and on the other, it portrays that past as a lost object. Just as in *Good bye Lenin!*, the film brings back a commodified communism through familiar settings[4] (yogurt jars, vinyl disks with rock bands like "Semnal M", toys, food and many others) and lets his characters speak in a similarly familiar language. Projected in the past, we learn how the life of an adolescent (Eva) changes when she and her boyfriend (Alexandru) accidentally break a sculpted bust of Ceaușescu at school. When confronted with their "crime", Alexandru, forced by his father, repents while Eva refuses and, as a punishment, is expelled and sent to a professional school in a poor neighbourhood. Then her destiny changes, when she meets Andrei with whom she plans to evade by swimming across the Danube.

As the director himself confesses, "the film is based on my own memories, on my nostalgia, on the belief in this world. I made this film because I was missing my

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[1] Oana GODEANU-KENWORTHY, "Deconstructing Ostalgia: The National Past Between Commodity and Simulacrum in Wolfgang Becker's Good Bye Lenin (2003)", *Journal of European Studies*, vol. 41, no. 2, 2011, pp. 162-163.

[2] Roger F. COOK, "*Good Bye, Lenin!*: Free-Market Nostalgia for Socialist Consumerism", *Journal of Germanic Studies*, vol. 43, no. 2, 2006, pp. 206-219.

[3] Ljubica SPASKOVSKA, "Recommunaissance…cit.", p. 147.

[4] Mirel BĂNICĂ, "Câteva reflexii despre nostalgie": http://editura.liternet.ro/carte/209/Andreea-Valean-Catalin-Mitulescu/Cum-mi-am-petrecut-sfarsitul-lumii.html (accessed 11 June 2012).

kindergarten, my high-school, Romania"[1]. The result is a tragi-comical portrait which combines the absurdity of everyday life with a struggle to make sense of it, just as we are now faced with the struggle against the past. It brings forward various ways of refusing the regime, as well as silently accepting it, with no moral judgement being passed on the characters.

The film articulates both authenticity and irony by forcing us to go back to real and vivid forms of communist life and then to take a distance from them. As Nadkarni well observes, irony, unlike kitsch, stems from "an awareness of the gap between what is said and what is meant", an "incongruity between surface reality and intention"[2]. In this case, irony fulfils a similar function in the post-Communist period, "circumventing the hegemony of state narratives about the recent Communist past and the transitional present"[3]. It is not deploring, nor oblivious, but constructive and enriching.

Similarly, *Tales from the Golden Age* is a film depicting popular urban myths from the communist period and combining humour and irony in an attempt to recreate and roblematise how mundane life was. If we are to see this film through the official "anti-communist" lenses, we would consider it a mockery and "happy nostalgia" trivialising a more hurtful truth. Alternatively, we could find enriched meanings by looking at the humane and also trivial things. When the writer Cristian Mungiu, challenges us to laugh when watching his film, it doesn't enforce a "dangerous nostalgia" that would idealise a past or make us project this ideal into present. Instead, the effect is humour because it actually demystifies certain fragments of that past. Take, for instance, the popular story of the monitoring editors of the communist newspaper *Scânteia* who went to extreme lengths in order to change a photo of Ceau□escu that would make him look as tall as the "Western imperialist" Valéry Giscard d'Estaing. Here, the former dictator is mocked, with an ironical effect that involves a moralising eye of the spectator that can now take distance from his past and better understand everyday life.

A different Ceaușescu appears in the three-hour docu-fiction created by Andrei Ujică, *The Autobiography of Nicolae Ceaușescu*. This 2010 film features a character that still fascinates and disturbs viewers and this time is left to play his part with no add-ons, no comments and no guidance. The resourceful selection of archive videos dealing with various public events from the life of the former dictator depict the megalomania, distorted reality, fake consensus and scary ridiculosity of a world which now looks unbelievable. This is an example of docu-fiction that combines pieces of a personal archive that is not judged, nor condemned, but presented as a mirror-image of his own propaganda. Ceaușescu is the product of an entire apparatus that the leader himself approved and perpetuated, which makes the film a proof of selective, yet undistorted memory. More than twenty years after, Ceaușescu looks different: "we all thought that we knew him, but in fact, we only knew our own aversions to the system that he represented and that poisoned our youth", declared the director in an interview[4]. Here too, the spectator has the ultimate word. He may evaluate, judge

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[1] *Ibidem*.

[2] Maya NADKARNI, "The Master's Voice…cit.", p. 615.

[3] Diana GEORGESCU, "'Ceaușescu Hasn't Died'…cit.", p. 172.

[4] Iulia BLAGA, Interview with Andrei UJICĂ: "Imaginea mea despre Nicolae Ceaușescu s-a umanizat – *Autobiografia lui Nicolae Ceaușescu*", *Agenda Liternet*, 2009: http://agenda.liternet.ro/articol/9556/Iulia-Blaga-Andrei-Ujica/Imaginea-mea-despre-Nicolae-Ceausescu-s-a-umanizat-Autobiografia-lui-Nicolae-Ceausescu.html (author's translation) (accessed 11 June 2012).

and try to understand the itinerary of a political character, while measuring his own lived past with another version of reality.

All these representations have already entered our popular culture and can no longer be interpreted as tragic misunderstandings of the past, but as enriching ways to deal with it, in all its absurdity. I thus conclude that instead of putting a final verdict on the matter, a more legitimate approach is to continue exploring it, by adding cultural, psychological, social and political explanations, while keeping in mind the dangers of both starting from zero in a purified present and glorifying a utopian "Golden Age".

CONCLUSIONS

Post-communist nostalgia reflects a troublesome relationship between our past and present. The underlying dilemma addressed this paper is: how could we make sense of a criminal past by paying a tribute to its victims, while making justice for those who see beyond its darks sides? If the Romanian president declared there is no negotiation with the past, how can we still build our identity and negotiate who we are?

This article focused on two controversial issues that triggered polarising narratives in this attempt to "settle with the past": the official document that condemns communism commissioned by the Romanian President in 2006 and the initiative of building a National Museum of Communist Dictatorship. I argued that a mere installation of communism into a "museum of redemption" is a problematic path in dealing with the past. While legitimately doing some form of moral justice to victims of communism, it impedes our understanding of decades from Romanian history by unilaterally portraying it as a crime of a failed regime, equally immoral as Nazism and risks being used as a mere instrument by morally problematic political leaders. Against this decisive anti-communist discourse which became official in Romania in 2006, alternative views emphasise the unresolved problems that hunt us and cannot simply be exorcised from the present.

In this context, post-communist nostalgia appears as a multifaceted phenomenon which cannot be addressed by adopting a moralising attitude that would find its equivalent in amnesia, lack of education, misunderstanding or mere dissatisfaction with the present. Certainly, selective memory operates within nostalgia, but its various manifestations ultimately represent that nostalgia reflects a need of understanding the past in its complexity, of recuperating a lost identity and of healing. People remember communism in many ways and confiscating their past would deny their right to search for a more authentic understanding. It might fuse even more cynicism toward politicians who portray themselves as formally against the communist legacy, but are thought to still share its pervasive practices. In this case communism is being re-mystified in the antagonistic narrative "bad/nostalgic/failed/East" versus "good/anti-nostalgic/victorious/West".

To deal with the recent communist past some alternative paths are worth attention. As such, films are just one such appealing means of remembering, imagining, shaping and detaching from the past. These narratives can go beyond purification or glorification and can function as "reflective nostalgias" that critically engage the past as an integral part of our post-communist present.